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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES

Letter dated 13 December 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I am writing to you concerning the statement by Ambassador Madeleine Albright, the distinguished representative of the United States of America, at the 82nd plenary meeting of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, held on 12 December 1996, in connection with the draft resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar contained in document A/51/619/Add.3 and Corr.1 and I have the honour to state the following:

The Union of Myanmar finds it most regrettable that at a time when the United Nations needs the constructive engagement of States to ensure effective and efficient promotion of human rights, the representative of the United States has attempted once again to politicize the issues of human rights.

As you may recall, the draft resolution was adopted without a vote in both the Third Committee and the plenary. My delegation has strongly rejected the negative elements in the draft and dissociated itself from the thrust of the resolution. Therefore, the statement of Ambassador Albright that the resolution was a reflection of the consensus view of the members of the United Nations is misleading.

It is evident that the sole intent of the statement is to "bash" Myanmar. The statement distorts the facts with the apparent objective of influencing international public opinion. It is glaring in its omission of the fact that it is the present Government that for the first time has charted a democratic path for Myanmar and boldly launched the establishment of a multi-party democratic system. The representative of the United States denigrated these momentous achievements of the Government by making wild allegations of repression. The

steps taken for the maintenance of law and order have been portrayed as acts of repression. She has tried to sow seeds of confusion. She also alleged the absence of freedom in the country. The people of Myanmar are indeed enjoying more freedom than in the recent past. It should be noted that it is the present Government that has opened up the country politically and economically. The new Constitution that is being drawn up by the National Convention will guarantee all the rights and freedoms and ensure their enjoyment by all citizens. It is the firm conviction of the Government of Myanmar that freedom imposed through external pressure will not endure.

It is an undeniable fact that the relentless efforts of the Government have resulted in peace and stability and have led to the return to the legal fold of the 15 out of 16 armed groups. This is an unprecedented achievement. The peace and stability that prevails throughout the length and breadth of the country is the result of negotiations, mutual trust and understanding among the national brethren. Ambassador Albright has charged the Government of Myanmar with employing harsh measures against the recent student demonstrations. On the contrary, the Government handled the event with utmost restraint.

Ambassador Albright misrepresented the situation when she stated that the Government was restricting the movements of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and gave its blessing to the mob attack on her. Nothing is further from the truth. It is the Government that has taken measures to ensure her safety. The Government has counselled her to exercise restraint in her movements in the light of the recent attack on her motorcade by a mob opposed to her. The mob attack would have been disastrous but for the provision of security by the Government. The fact that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was present at the commemoration by the National League for Democracy (NLD) of the National Day of Myanmar on 5 December and at other social functions attests to the absence of restrictions on her. This gives the lie to the allegations.

The call by Ambassador Albright for a dialogue between the Government and the leader of NLD, or with other democratic leaders and representatives of the major ethnic groups cannot but be considered as blatant interference in the internal affairs of Myanmar. No dialogue is more meaningful and representative than the current one at the National Convention where significant progress has been achieved. Important transformations are taking place in Myanmar today. At this delicate stage when significant gains have been made in our efforts to achieve national reconciliation and in drafting a new Constitution, utmost care has to be taken to ensure that our efforts would no go awry. A national convention of representatives from different strata of the Myanmar society as well as nationalities is being held. This is where consensus must be forged. To call for an alternative dialogue is to attempt to rend the fabric of the Myanmar nation. It is neither appropriate nor morally defensible for any country to pass judgement on our internal process or to attempt to channel that process to its own liking. To call this process a sham is preposterous.

Ambassador Albright has also jumped to the conclusion that the Government of Myanmar has refused to cooperate with the United Nations. Myanmar's record of cooperation with the United Nations is well known. With regard to the proposed visit to Myanmar of the Representative of the Secretary-General, the

Myanmar side responded positively and in a timely manner. It is not the Myanmar side that closed the door.

To our regret, Ambassador Albright exceeded the bounds of decency and courtesy normally accorded to one another among the Members of the United Nations when she addressed my country as "Burma". As my country has officially communicated to the Secretariat the change of the name of my country from "Burma" to "Myanmar", to address the country otherwise is a show of arrogance that stems from disregard for the principles of sovereign equality and for the accepted norms of behaviour among the Members of the United Nations. We strongly object to this reference. We believe that it should be corrected accordingly in the official records of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. In addition, she ended her statement with a veiled threat: "The more time elapses before these steps are taken, the more the pressure will build". Whatever the intent of these expressions may be, these threats are unacceptable.

The statement of the representative of the United States of America represents an example of a powerful State applying bullying tactics on smaller States under cover of high moral principles. We take strong exception to this approach.

We welcome the statement that the international community would like to see Myanmar develop into a stable, prosperous and democratic society. That goal can be best achieved by allowing the people of Myanmar to fashion their own destiny.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Win MRA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative and
Alternate Chairman of the
Myanmar Delegation